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Berryman, D. (2009). Field surveys Undertaken by the Ulster Archaeological Society in 2007. *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 68, 158-167.

Published in:
Ulster Journal of Archaeology

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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FIELD SURVEYS UNDERTAKEN BY THE ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN 2007¹

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The fieldwork survey group of the Ulster Archaeological Society carried out a second season of field surveys at four sites in 2007. These were a rath at Lisnabreeny, Co Down; the Yew Terraces at Castle Ward, Co Down; Yellow Jack's cairn on Divis Mountain, Co Antrim; and stone circles and stone rows at Davagh Lower, Co Tyrone.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the newly formed fieldwork survey group successfully undertook its first season of surveying ancient monuments across Northern Ireland. This endeavour was made possible by a bequest from the late Dr Ann Hamlin OBE and the support of Barrie Hartwell, Queen's University Belfast, and Malachy Conway, National Trust. Dr Hamlin's bequest allowed the Ulster Archaeological Society to purchase survey equipment, while Barrie Hartwell and Malachy Conway facilitated the Society in making use of the equipment. Harry Welsh, UAS fieldwork co-ordinator, has provided a summary report of the sites surveyed during the first season of

fieldwork (Welsh 2008). This paper summarizes the surveys carried out during the second season in 2007. The fieldwork survey group has grown from 24 members to 37 and has increased its number of survey days from seven to nine; the number of days spent report writing has also grown from two to five resulting in 119 person days being worked by the group over the year. The group also acquired some new equipment — a report binder and a Garmin eTrex GPS. The GPS is useful as it allows the plans to be fixed in geographical space. The report binder will be used to bind paper copies of reports to be archived.



Pl 1 Lisnabreeny
rath from the
south.

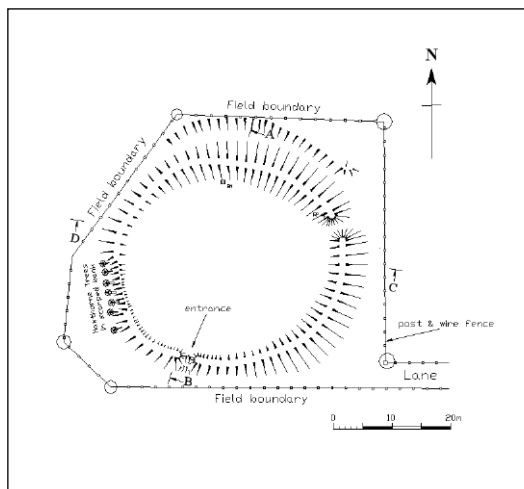


Fig 1 Plan of Lisnabreeny rath.

LISNABREENY RATH, CASTLEREAGH, CO DOWN

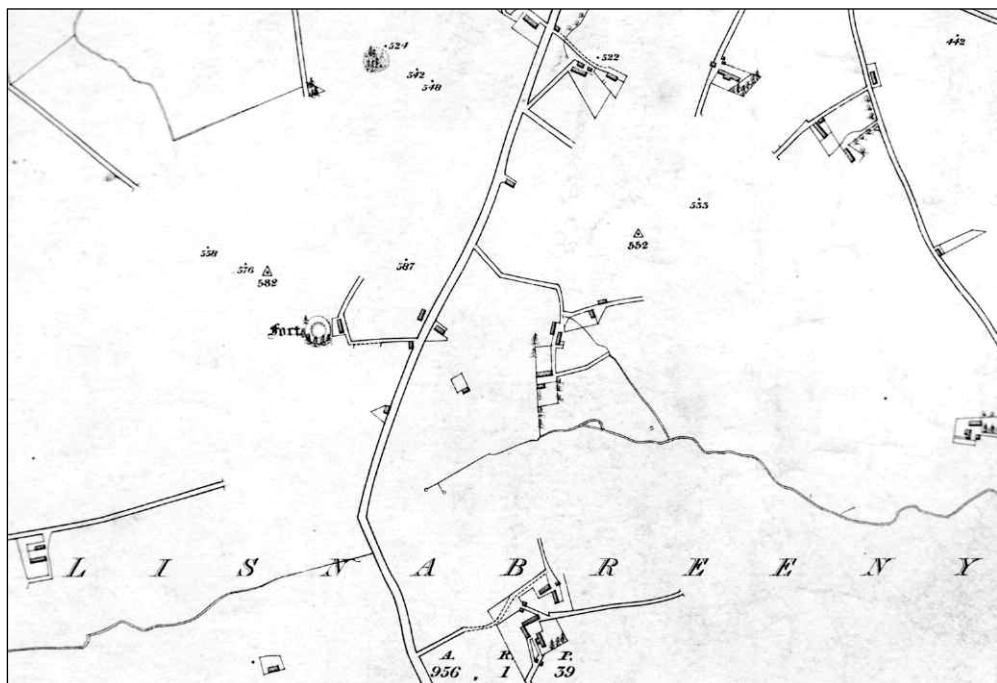
The first survey of the 2007 season was undertaken on 28–29 April and 26 May in the townland of Lisnabreeny, Co Down, on a site classified by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) as a rath of the early Christian period (SMR DOW 009:011; IGR J 372 694) (Pl 1). Situated in the Castlereagh hills to the south of Belfast, the rath has

an excellent southern perspective, providing views of north Co Down, the Ards and Strangford Lough, as well as the Lagan Valley and Belfast Lough. Many of the adjacent hills were once crowned by raths, although most have been destroyed in recent centuries. It is known that there were nine in 1834, but only three survive today (DOW 009:010; DOW 009:011; DOW 009:021). The townland name of Lisnabreeny suggests an association with hospitality and fairy mythology — the original of the name, *Lios na Bruighne*, means ‘fort of the fairy palace’ (www.placenamesni.org; 02.11.2010). Lisnabreeny rath has been scheduled under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The rath is an almost perfect circle, with a large bulge on the eastern side (Fig 1). The average internal diameter is 33m, which puts it in the middle of the range of recorded rath diameters (Stout 1997, 15). The original entrance was in the south, but a more pronounced gap has been created in the north-east in recent times. There is the possibility that a counterscarp ridge exists to the north-east.

At the north end of the enclosure the rath floor is more or less level with the field on the other side of the ditch. The field to the east falls gradually lower than the rath floor where it tapers off to meet the path on the south side, whereas to the west the field is much lower from north to south. It is difficult to

Fig 2 Detail of the first (1834) edition OS 6" map showing Lisnabreeny rath.



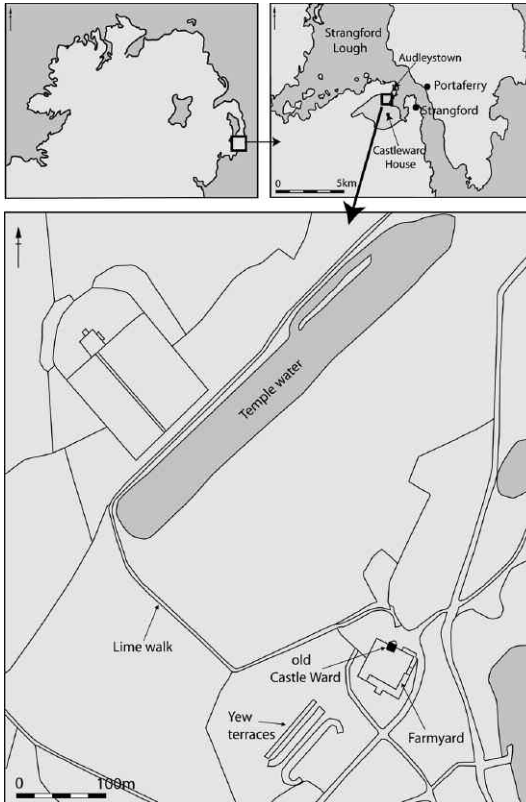


Pl 2 Yew Terraces from the north-west.

estimate what the original slope on the east side of the rath might have been since this area has been backfilled after the removal of a farm building.

The rath was used as a farmyard until the early 1800s and the landscape has seen a number of changes in more recent times. Today there are

mature ash, sycamore and beech trees growing from the bank on the eastern half and hawthorn is growing beyond the ditch around the rest of the rath. This is contrary to the position of plantations in the 1834 6" Ordnance Survey (OS) map (Fig 2); this shows conifers surrounding most of the rath, with only the eastern part devoid of trees. The position of the conifers coincides with a reduction in the height of the bank, but it is unclear if there is a direct correlation between these two features.



YEW TERRACES, CASTLE WARD, CO DOWN

The second site to be surveyed was the Yew Terraces at Castle Ward in the townland of Castleward, Co Down (SMR DOW 031:071; IGR J 5730 5010). The survey was carried out over four days — 16–17 and 30 June, and 28 July 2007. The entire 1720s designed landscape of Castle Ward is protected as a scheduled landscape under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

In 1570, the Ward family purchased the estate from the earl of Kildare and they held it until 1950, when it was passed to the National Trust as part-payment of death duties on the death of the sixth viscount Bangor. The estate has been altered over the centuries, with many gardening developments, buildings and landscape features. However, it is still one of the most complete demesne landscapes in Northern Ireland and one of the few to be scheduled.

The Yew Terraces have always been an enigmatic

Fig 3 Map of Castle Ward showing the location of the Yew Terraces (Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork).



Pl 3 Profile of the Yew Terraces, from the north-east.

monument within this landscape, with their origin and function remaining unclear. The Yew Terraces consist of three parallel rows of yew trees, each row on a tiered platform on the side of a hill. The terraces are aligned north-east/south-west and lie to the

south-west of the farmyard. There are a number of buildings and phases of occupation with which the Yew Terraces might be associated. The first is the tower house known as Old Castle Ward, built by Nicholas Ward in about 1610. The tower house was

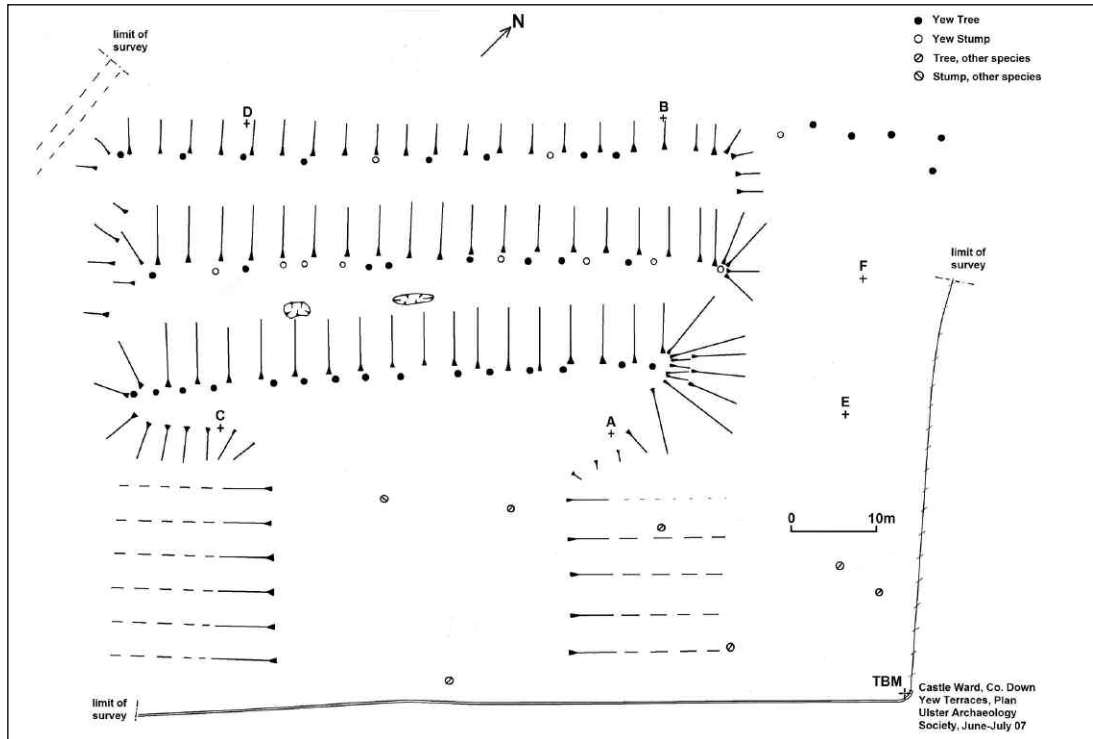


Fig 4 Plan of the Yew Terraces.



Pl 4 Yellow
Jack's cairn.

later extended with the addition of a Jacobean house onto the south-east face; this is the second phase of occupation that may be associated with the Yew Terraces. The third phase of occupation was the construction of the Queen Anne house, built around 1710-14 and situated to the north of the farmyard. This building was surrounded by formal gardens and water features, and the Temple Water is one of the

features created at this time. The Queen Anne house was superseded by the current Castle Ward house in the 1760s, commissioned by Bernard Ward and reflecting the differing tastes of Ward and his wife Anne. At some stage between 1846 and 1859, the Queen Anne house was demolished.

The survey of the Yew Terraces clearly shows the three tiers of the landscaping and the positions of the

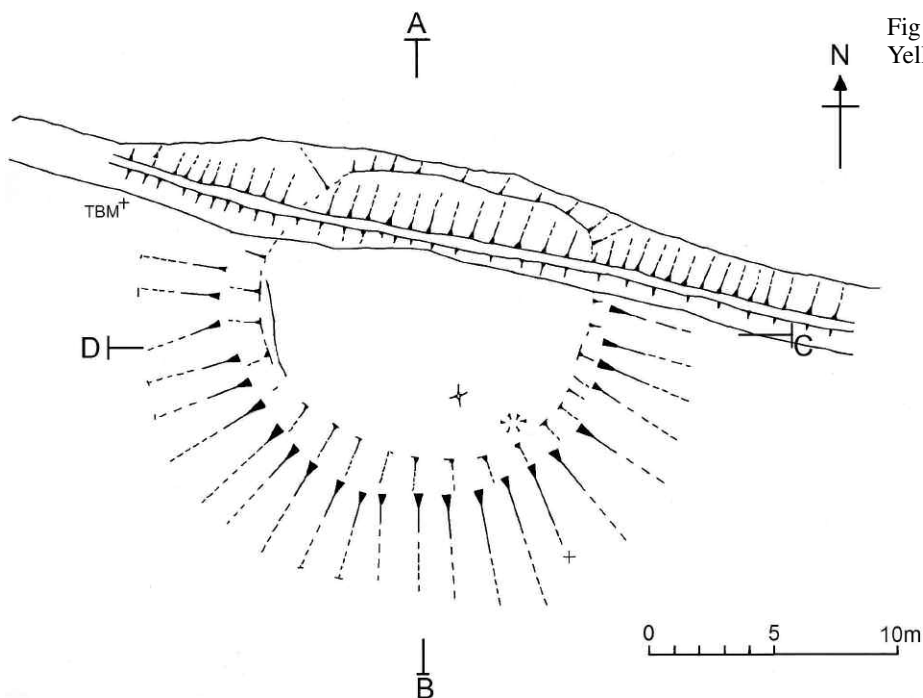


Fig 5 Plan of
Yellow Jack's cairn.



Fig 6 Food vessel found at Yellow Jack's cairn (after Patterson 1871).

yew trees. The trees are planted close to the slope of the tiers, thus providing enough space for walking. It appears that the trees were originally planted at regular intervals along the terrace; however, some trees only remain as stumps and others have been lost completely. The terraces are aligned north-east/south-west. The alignment and design of the Yew Terraces suggest that they were originally associated with Old Castle Ward or the attached

Jacobean house. The Yew Terraces appear to have been a landscape feature, creating a line of approach to Old Castle Ward.

YELLOW JACK'S CAIRN, DIVIS MOUNTAIN, CO ANTRIM

The third site to be examined was Yellow Jack's cairn on Divis Mountain, surveyed on 25 August 2007. The cairn lies on a townland boundary, with Altigarron to the north and Divis to the south (SMR ANT 060:015; IGR J 2690 7560). The monument is not protected by the NIEA, but it is on National Trust property. The National Trust has owned the Divis and Black Mountain property since 2005; before then it was in the hands of the Ministry of Defence.

The site is on the summit of Armstrong's Hill (380m+OD), 1.2km west of the summit of Divis Mountain. There are clear views of Slemish, Donegore Hill and Lyles Hill, and across Lough Neagh to Slieve Gullion, Ram's Island and Crew Hill. The cairn site

is a carpet of green moss, short grass, sedges, wild sorrel and buttercup, with some rushes in hollows. In December, it gives a green appearance in contrast to the prevailing browns of the surrounding vegetation. Horses and cattle graze the land. The townland boundary that the cairn straddles runs along a low bank with stone revetting on the south side.

Much of the cairn has been removed, probably



Pl 5 Davagh Lower stone circles.

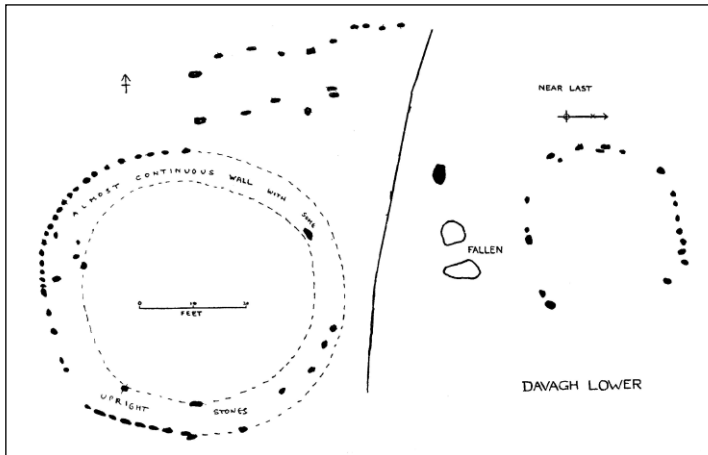


Fig 7 Plan of Davagh Lower stone circles (after Davies 1939).

during the mid-19th century, and the site is considerably truncated north of the townland boundary. It is likely that much of the cairn material that has been removed has been reused during the construction of the wall that forms the boundary. The main area of the cairn measures approximately 15m in diameter; outside the central area, the slope of the cairn merges with the natural slope of the hill. The wall is approximately 1.5m high from the base of the ditch; the cairn rises from ground level to almost the same height as the wall. It appears that there is a change in the gradient of the cairn, emphasized in Fig 5 by the use of different hachure lines.

A food vessel was reported to have been found here in 1840 and was subsequently discussed and

illustrated (Fig 6) by several writers, including Patterson (1871, 506-7), Benn (1877, 58) and O'Lavery (1880, 341). Unfortunately, there is no account of the circumstances of the find, whether by deliberate excavation or chance discovery, but it is reasonable to assume that the cairn was dismantled about this time. The bowl was described as being '5 inches high, 6¾ inches in diameter at the broadest part, and 6

inches in diameter across the mouth. The bottom was plain' (Patterson 1871, 506). The current location of the bowl is unknown; it was last recorded in the possession of James Hunter of Dunmurry in 1871 (ibid).

The identity of Yellow Jack and the significance of his name are alike unknown. A local chieftain or hero with the epithet 'Yellow', perhaps an O'Neill, may have become associated with the cairn by burial at or near it. The Annals of the Four Masters mention a Seaan Buidhe, but his associations are with Tyrone, not Clondeboy. Altigarron may mean 'Glen of the copse' or 'Glen of the horses' (<http://www.placenamesni.org/>; 02.11.2010).

There are a number of unusual features near the

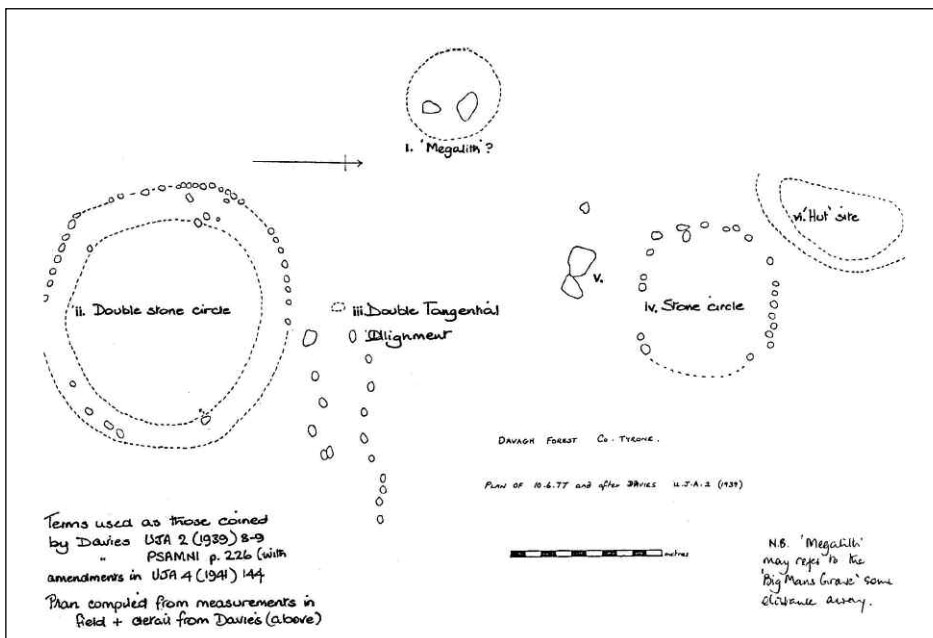


Fig 8 Plan of Davagh Lower (after Foley & Given 1977).

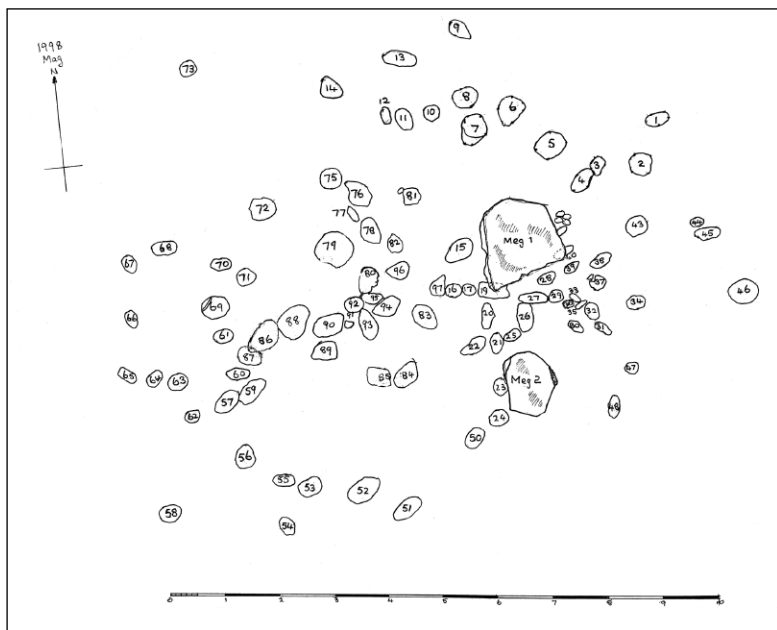


Fig 9 Plan of Davagh Lower, combining Hayes (1998) and the UAS survey.

STONE CIRCLES AND STONE ROWS, DAVAGH LOWER, CO TYRONE

The final survey in 2007 was that of the circles and stone rows in the townland of Davagh Lower, Co Tyrone (SMR TYR 020:009; IGR H 7047 8674), which was carried out on 29 September. This site, located in Davagh Forest, was so extensive that a second survey was carried out on 25 October 2008. This group of ring cairn, stone circle and double alignment is a scheduled monument under the Historic

Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. One is a flat-topped basalt boulder (1.2m x 1.0m) with circular dimples that collect rainwater. Two of the depressions have diameters of 90mm and another of 40mm. It is not clear whether the depressions are natural or artificial. There is also a hollow to the south-east of the cairn containing several stones. Neither of these features was surveyed.

Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The site comprises a complex of standing stones, stone circles and other enigmatic structures that appear to have been first recorded by Oliver Davies in 1939 (Davies 1939). The site within Davagh Forest lies on gently sloping land at an altitude of about 208m in a small valley formed by Davagh Water, one of the headstreams of the Owenreagh



Pl 6 Davagh Lower, probable hut site.

River, which flows westwards to the River Foyle. The name Davagh is derived from the Irish word *dabhach* meaning a deep vat-like hollow, a cauldron or a deep well.

After Davies' initial survey, the site was not properly studied again until Claire Foley and Annie Given assessed it for the Archaeological Survey of Northern Ireland, producing a sketch map of the site (based on Davies 1939) in 1977 shortly after limited forest clearance. This survey identified some previously unrecorded monuments in the area, the most important being the 'hut site', which is one of the most visible features of the complex. More recently, Tom Hayes, with his wife and daughter, carried out research into the complex. Beginning in 1997 by clearing vegetation off the complex, they then undertook a programme of extensive survey lasting twelve years. Hayes made detailed plans of the locations of the stones and compiled descriptions of each structure. In 1995, Aubrey Burl provides a description of the site in his *Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany* (Burl 1995).

The UAS survey group carried out a preliminary survey with the aim of producing plan drawings of the site; this was done with the group's Lecia Sprinter 100 EDM and a Lecia Geosystems GS20 Professional Data Mapper GPS, owned by the National Trust. This was to be accompanied by a photographic survey and the completion of a Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) form. However, the survey was hindered by a number of factors. The EDM readings were less accurate than normal due to the fact that the site was on steeply sloping ground and covered a large area, much of which was overgrown. Conditions underfoot are treacherous with many small stones covered with mosses and tussock grass, often hidden from view; this posed significant risk of injury from tripping or slipping. The presence of tree cover made acquisition of GPS data difficult and often impossible.

The survey revealed the possibility of a significant extension of the tangential stone row alignment, for up to 30m in an easterly direction within the forest. The forest clearance of 1977 served only to expose the most obvious archaeology, leaving the smaller stone circle, as described by Davies, and the possible continuation of the stone row obscured.

Another feature of potential archaeological significance was uncovered during clearance of surface vegetation approximately 5m south of the hut site. This structure is adjacent to the feature Hayes describes as 'Three large slabs, one upright

and two fallen' and consists of a sub-rectangular structure, approximately 3m long and 2m wide. It was constructed by positioning a number of large flat-faced stones, partially buried, to form a box like structure, resembling a cist. This structure was not formally surveyed due to time constraints. Evidence was discovered of a number of large recumbent stones stretching into the forest in a westerly direction from the hut site; these may have formed part of a stone row but are more likely to be *in situ* glacial erratics.

The presence of a cist would not be unexpected. Davagh is situated in the area with the highest concentration of megalithic monuments in Western Europe and is not far from the Beaghmore stone circle complex. There are a number of possible similarities between Davagh and the nearby Beaghmore and Copney stone circles; it could be suggested that two of the circles identified by Hayes are connected and reflect the pairs of circles at Beaghmore. The circles at both Beaghmore and Copney are associated with cairns or cists.

The function of stone circles is unknown and much debated amongst archaeologists. Possibilities include burial places, temples for ritual activities, places of assembly, or even astronomical instruments. A further theory is that the circles were built in an attempt to preserve the fertility of the land, which was being lost to the encroaching bogs. Radiocarbon dates from Beaghmore average at 1930 BC, suggesting that they were constructed at a time when peat was already beginning to reclaim the land cleared by the circle builders (Burl 1979). It is likely that Davagh was also constructed as the peat was beginning to cover the landscape.

Given the limitations of time during the survey, and the potential importance of this site, it was decided not to proceed any further with the current programme of fieldwork. Instead, a preliminary report was prepared and submitted to the NIEA, in anticipation that the scheduled area of the site may be increased and the site protected from any further damage from forestry activity.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2007 the survey group successfully carried out four more surveys of ancient monuments across Northern Ireland. The work can be used to inform future research on the sites, possibly through excavation; but in all cases, the reports of the group's research has advanced current knowledge. The survey group continues to provide an important role for the recording and protection of historic monuments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ulster Archaeological Society is indebted to the late Ann Hamlin, whose bequest to the Society continues to enable the members to carry out fieldwork. The Society would also like to acknowledge the support of Barrie Hartwell and John Davison of Queen's University Belfast, who have provided equipment and expertise. Malachy Conway, archaeologist with the National Trust in Northern Ireland, has been a constant source of support for the Society and has willingly given his time to help the survey group. Finally, the Society would especially like to thank all members of the group who have freely devoted many hours of their time and without whom this endeavour would have been impossible.

NOTE

- 1 Reports are published here in summary and are available in full on the society's website: www.uarcsoc.org.

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